


THE MARRIAGE OF SAPPHO & EAZY-E

JOSEPH RATHGEBER

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“Hymenaios I,” “Hymenaios II,” “Hymenaios IV,” and “Epithalamium I” originally appeared in *nin Journal*.

*A black hood covers my face.*

—“Neighborhood Sniper”

## HYMENAIOS I

Sappho's *floruit* was a fragment. She was a fragmented bitch.  
Her lyrics carved in bas-relief on a stele, as phallic as a steel beam.

Eazy-E stalks the streetz of muthaphukkin Compton, slinging dope,  
hacking an asthmatic cough. The arms of his nylon LA Raiders

snap jacket oaring out from a coastal wind: fingers crossed in Westside  
w's. Sappho is all ellipses and square brackets, hyacinth and hymen;

the brim of Eric Wright's ballcap reads SILENCE = DEATH in silver  
stitching. He aims two 9-millimeter pistols like coal tipples;

he's a hector. Sappho drips nectar off a pair of pink, hard nipples.  
*O my virginity!* She's dapple-throned. Eazy's a snare-knitter.

They French kiss like a diphthong. They do the dozens. They discuss  
buttsex. They are posthumous. They core a quince-apple.



## EPITHALAMIUM I

It came over the airwaves: AIDS. Sappho was getting licked up  
and down like an acrostic. Doctors asked Eazy if he had *any last werdz*.

Dre came to his bedside in sandals cobbled from oxbides,  
broidered straps wrapped around his ankles. Hospital staff was strapped.

Sappho sang Gloria Gaynor's disco hit "I Will Extant." Eazy's gown  
made it clear that clothing was scant. His jheri curl glistened.

He turned to Dre: *I'll push your shit in and stuff your face*. Eazy-E:  
Catullus straight outta Compton. The thin vas deferens between soft  
and stiff. Some reporters said he fucked Freddie Mercury.  
Others said it was junk. Strictly-dickly. He grinds his bone. Fee-fi-fo-fum.

## HYMENAIOS II

*Maidenhood, whither art thou gone from me?* It's eazy-er said  
than dunn. Sappho laps at a clitoral hood like boyz-n-the-hood  
  
switch on the hydraulics. The headmistress is exiled from Lesbos.  
She towers over tall men. She brillos her ambrosia bowl, scours it  
  
until it shines like a soft, satin cushion. There ain't no nutz on her chin.  
She's got a foot fetish and uses a potsherd to pumice her calluses.

A *pais* archives her poems: each poem an ovum in her oeuvre. Oh,  
the hoopla over her ooplasm. She plucks the cithara while nymphs twerk.



### HYMENAIOS III

A *thiasos* is a sorority house. Pledges rock vinyl jackets over togas at the mixer. This one gets a kegstand concussion. This one scissor-sisters Sappho. They kiss for an iPhone camera. Eazy needs to pimp-slap a ho. She breathes hotness like a chimera with beer breath and Trident gum. Stir not the pebbles, sir. Undress the gossamer garments. Sappho shampoos her girlfriend's hair in the vanity sink, her application

of unguents is generous. Scalp smells of lavender. Eazy's corpse is empurpling in decay on the ground outside Cedars Sinai Medical Center.

Sappho and the girls take a Leucadian leap to build team morale—it's a trust exercise. Eazy-E monitors the red Solo cups for Rufinols.

## EPITHALAMIUM II

I am not of a malign nature but have a calm temper. I am clad in purple mantle. O is for Adonis. They claimed I had a needle infused with H.

They claimed I slept with the record execs. The CDC promotes PrEP, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for prevention of HIV in men who have sex

with men (MSM). I saw it on the CNN news ticker. I submitted a personal ad: 31YO SBM, WE, seeks SWM for LTR. I got no responses except one:

a bulldagger. SWF seeks SWF(s) for PnP. GSOH a must. I need to 187um.  
Her vagina like a napkin dripping. My scrotum like a hanky hanging.

### EPITHALAMIUM III

Him she called her son. Outfitted him in a black robe. He was a she-thang  
in a g-string: No studio gangsta. She let him know what was owed.

She let him know what odes were. She was cruisin' down the street in his six-  
fo'.

It was an Impala ganked from whitefolk. She became the mother

of a mack daddy. She powdered his face. He blushed like overused rouge.  
She got him a cosmetics endorsement. He was a bastard and she was a  
whoreson.

#### HYMENAIOS IV

I am your shepherd. I am a cool breeze. I am the one who prodded you.  
I am the one who indoctrinated you. I got you saying *thongs* instead

of *flip-flops*. I made you celibate. I fingered your bellybutton. I invaded  
your sanctum. Licked your taint. I made you a saint. My kiss made you

rank. I taught you scansion: anapests, spondees, pyrrhics, dactyls, iambs.  
I am your sucker. I am your swallower. I am a swallow on your cool breeze.

JOSEPH RATHGEBER is an author, poet, high school English teacher, and adjunct professor from New Jersey. His story collection is *The Abridged Autobiography of Yousef R. and Other Stories* (ELJ Publications, 2014). His work of hybrid poetry is *MJ* (Another New Calligraphy, 2015). He is the recipient of a 2014 New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship (Poetry) and a 2016 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship (Prose).

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